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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003454

SIPDIS

NSC FOR DENNIS WILDER AND LIZ PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/24/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: ANTI-GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATION IN BANGKOK STARTS
STRONG BUT LOSES STEAM, NO VIOLENCE

REF: BANGKOK 3426 (LETHAL EXPLOSION)

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason: 1.4 (b and d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

11. (SBU) Tens of thousands of supporters of the anti-government People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) demonstrated at the parliament on the morning of November 24, causing the cancellation of a legislative session. As of late afternoon November 24, the main protest outside of the PAD base at Government House consisted of approximately 2,000 people at Bangkok's Don Muang airport (used commercially for domestic flights only), where the cabinet has used facilities since the PAD takeover of the Government House compound. Demonstrators also temporarily besieged other government facilities and cut off electricity to them. The RTG has taken these actions in stride. The police remain the lead agency responding to the protests.

12. (C) Comment: It is unclear how long PAD intends to keep up this latest round of demonstrations, although PAD figures have vowed to continue at least until Wednesday, November 26, to disrupt a planned cabinet meeting. A PAD co-leader has trumpeted the current efforts as part of a "final battle" against the government (which PAD views as a proxy for former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra), but the comparatively small number engaged in the ongoing Don Muang protest provides hope that the recent rhetoric is no more than that. Given recent acts of violence involving PAD (including a fatality -- reftel), we did not take for granted that the November 24 protests would be peaceful, but so far there is no sign of violence in connection with the ongoing demonstrations. End Summary and Comment.

PROTEST AT PARLIAMENT, THEN AT AIRPORT

13. (SBU) The People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) rallied tens of thousands of sympathizers to the Government House compound on November 23 for a renewed "final battle," the same slogan used August 26 to launch the current phase of its

protest. The stated rationale was two-fold: to protest the death of a PAD supporter the previous week (reftel), and to prevent the government from amending the constitution, even though such amendments were not on the parliamentary docket. On the morning of November 24, the PAD marched on the parliament, blocked access to the compound, and cut off the electricity to the building. In response, House Speaker Chai Chidchob canceled a planned joint House-Senate session intended to review/approve international agreements. After Chai's announcement, PAD demonstrators expressed satisfaction that they had prevented the session from convening and dispersed from the parliament.

¶4. (SBU) Hundreds of PAD protestors moved from the parliament to the Don Muang airport, which the cabinet has used for its meetings after the PAD occupation of Government House. As of the late afternoon of November 24, it appeared that approximately 2,000 PAD protestors were at the airport but had not impeded commercial flight operations. (Note: Commercial airlines only use Don Muang airport for domestic flights. End Note.) PAD leaders talked of remaining at Don Muang airport overnight, and of demonstrating at Suvarnabhumi international airport when Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat returns from the AEC summit in Peru.

OTHER VENUES TARGETED

¶5. (SBU) PAD remains encamped at Government House and also targeted other sites early on November 24:

- PAD protestors held a demonstration at the Bangkok Metropolitan Police headquarters and cut off electricity to the building; a police official told us there were

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approximately 1,000 protestors present at mid-day.

- Several hundred PAD supporters demonstrated at the Ministry of Finance and cut off electricity to the building;

- PAD also blocked access to the headquarters of the Chart Thai party (Thailand's third-largest party and a member of the governing coalition) and cut off electricity to the building.

¶6. (SBU) As of the late afternoon of November 24, the actions listed immediately above had ended, but approximately 2,500 PAD protestors were demonstrating at the Bank of Thailand. Approximately 11,000 PAD supporters remained at or around the Government House compound, according to a police contact.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

¶7. (SBU) Prime Minister Somchai, interviewed in Peru, continued to reject PAD's demand that he resign. The police reportedly readied approximately 1,500 personnel overnight for the demonstrations, with some military troops to be available to assist the police if required. Unlike the previous round of violence near parliament October 7, the police readied at least 20 fire trucks able to use water cannons to disperse protesters, though in the end that proved unnecessary. Somchai directed Army Commander Anupong Paojinda to monitor the security situation, according to press reports. The government reportedly is seeking talks with PAD leaders, although the purpose of the talks remains unclear. As of close of business November 24, we have not heard of any violent clashes between the security forces and demonstrators.

PAD'S "FINAL BATTLE," THE SEQUEL?

¶8. (SBU) The November 23-24 demonstrations come in the context of increasing tension. PAD co-leader Sondhi

Limthongkul has been the most outspoken of his group in publicly framing the ongoing protests as part of a "final battle" intended to bring down the current government, but this is already the second time Sondhi has launched protest marches with that phrase, and it is unclear how long PAD intends to maintain its demonstrations absent achieving any objectives.

19. (SBU) The pro-government United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) rallied 20,000 supporters peacefully November 23 at a Buddhist temple outside of Bangkok but did not move to confront PAD.
JOHN